

Chutzpah in a Letter Intended for the King of Yamhad

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[TH 72.16 is a letter recovered at Mari that was destined for the royal court in Aleppo. In this missive the king of Mari, Zimri-Lim, rejoined a grievance of Yarim-Lim, the king of Yamhad. Yarim-Lim had complained that Zimri-Lim was harboring a thief and insisted that this fugitive be returned. Zimri-Lim's response defends the alleged fugitive and maintains that he was a victim, not a thief. In so doing, Zimri-Lim used the imagery of a bird fleeing before a bird of prey and employs two unusual forms: *ḥa-ZI-i[p-ti]m* and *[ḥ]u-ZU-pa-at*. This article connects these forms with another Akkadian lemma *ḥiṣpatum* and etymologically links them with the root ḥ-ṣ-p, which is best known from Aramaic, where it means "to be excessively attentive, to be bold."]

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TH 72.16 is a poorly preserved letter that was drafted for Zimri-Lim and destined for the king of Yamhad, Yarim-Lim.¹ The tablet's state-of-preservation no doubt contributed to only a partial publication in an *editio princeps*.² Subsequent collations by J.M. Durand, however, have made significantly more of the letter available as well as rendered other previously published portions newly intelligible. At the same time, Durand's improved readings of the tablet also have brought to light several new interpretive challenges.³ One such challenge is the pair of words *ḥa-ZI-i[p-ti]m* (l. 29) and *[ḥ]u-ZU-pa-at* (l. 30), which as Durand noted are unclear in terms of the verbal root to which they should be connected.⁴ In what follows, I will treat the forms *ḥa-ZI-i[p-ti]m* and *[ḥ]u-ZU-pa-at* and suggest that they should be related to the Akkadian lemma *ḥiṣpatum* and

1. The addressee and find-spot of this tablet make it an unusual artifact. This missive was found in room 115 within the palace at Mari and as such, it was either a copy of a missive that was dispatched to the king of Yamhad or a draft of a letter that may or may not have been dispatched. Charpin and Ziegler have suggested that letters like TH 72.16 are likely the latter given similar missives composed for Yasmah-Addu (i.e. *ARM* 1.108 [= *LAPO* 16.34] and *ARM* 1.113+ [= *LAPO* 16.36]) that also were found at Mari and "...a comme caractéristique d'être écrit en dépit du bon sens. L'écriture ne cesse de grossir et de se déformer jusqu'à devenir difficilement déchiffrable en certains endroits du verso avec des signes manifestement incomplets [Et l]es érasures sont multiples" (Charpin and Ziegler 2003, 17). See also the remarks on this phenomenon by Durand 1987, 175 (cf., perhaps, the erasure at the end of TH 72.16:27). The matter is also briefly considered by Sasson 2007, 467-468.

2. Malamat 1983.

3. Durand 1997, 388-90.

4. Durand remarked, "[l]e verbe *haZâpum* m'est cependant inconnu et je ne sais à quoi le rattacher étymologiquement" (Durand 1997, 389).

etymologically linked with the Semitic root *ḥ-š-p*, which is best known from Aramaic, that means “to be excessively attentive, to be bold.”

The forms *ḥa-ZI-i[p-ti]m* and *[ḥ]u-ZU-pa-at* belong to a section of TH 72.16 that transitions from Zimri-Lim’s recounting of his smith-worker’s misfortunes (lines 5-26) to a commentary on these events (lines 26-35, see translation below). The Mariote king’s commentary takes the form of an extended metaphor, in which the prepositional phrase *ana êm*⁵ in line 28 invites comparison between a bird (*[i]-šú-ri-im* [line 28]) and the smith-worker, who had fled to Zimri-Lim. At the same time, this comparison is further facilitated by the repetition of the verbal root in the forms *iq-te-em* (line 31) and *[i-q]a-at-te-em* (line 35), which is able to describe the activities of both the bird and smith-worker.⁶ And the verbal form *ú-wa-aš-ša-ar*, too, is repeated in lines 32 and 33, further extending the metaphor since these forms are equally appropriate to discussions of freeing birds (from a cage) as they are to discharging or releasing persons.

The translations of the forms *ḥa-ZI-i[p-ti]m* and *[ḥ]u-ZU-pa-at* in TH 72.16 have essentially been inferred from the context; most interpreters comfortably translate *ḥa-ZI-i[p-ti]m* and *[ḥ]u-ZU-pa-at ad sensum*. Durand, for example, intuited that “[c]ontextuellement, il signifie « fuir » ou « être effrayé »; sa forme II a le sens approximatif de « se réfugier », « chercher asile »”.⁷ And Sasson, too, rendered the forms as “fleeing” and “flutters,” though he offered the caveat that his “translation of this entire passage ... is tentative”.⁸ One possible solution to explain the sibilant in the forms found in TH 72.16 is to correlate them with the lemma *ḥiṣpatum* (*ḥi-IS-pa-tum*). The comparison of the forms *ḥa-ZI-i[p-ti]m* and *[ḥ]u-ZU-pa-at* to the lemma *ḥiṣpatum* (*ḥi-IS-pa-tum*), in fact, allows for a semantic distribution for all three forms *ḥiṣpatum*, *ḥaṣiptum*, and *ḥuṣupat* that conforms to an etymological connection with the Aramaic verbal root *ḥ-š-p*.⁹

The lone attestation of the form *ḥiṣpatum* cited in *AHW* is found in *AbB* 1 128. This missive was sent from a servant to his master and the tenor of the letter is one of being down-trodden. In the letter, the servant recounts how his master had formerly told him that he could accompany him to Babylon, yet the servant lamented that he was still being held up at Sippar. The letter is fragmentary in crucial parts, but while incomplete, it is clear that the servant was disheartened by his circumstances: “I am hanging around idle and leaning against walls. I have already written to my lord ten times about my departure to Babylon, but an answer has not arrived.”¹⁰ Furthermore, the servant delicately revealed that his remaining at Sippar had been superintended by either

5. See note 21, below.

6. The root of this verb is most likely to be connected to the Syriac root *qṭy* “to be driven about, wander” (cf. Brockelmann 1928, 656; Durand 1990, 63 n. 132). Durand has also suggested that it be related to Aramaic, *qṭm*, “to cover with ashes, to supplicate,” with the contextual connotation “to approach with an appeal” (Durand 1997, 390, n. i).

7. Durand 1997, 389-90.

8. Sasson 2015, 223.

9. From the orthographies in TH 72.16 the first and final consonants of the root behind the forms *ḥa-ZI-i[p-ti]m* and *[ḥ]u-ZU-pa-at* in TH 72.16 are all but certain (While the IP-sign could be read *ip* or *ib*, yet the use of the PA-sign in line 30 confirm the reading of the labial as /p/). The ZI- and ZU-signs (lines 29, 30), however, are equivocal as to the sibilant represented by the second root-consonant of these forms. The attested orthographies for the lemma *ḥiṣpatum* (*ḥi-IS-pa-tum* and *ḥi-IS-pat*) do not clarify the middle root consonant of this root. The proposed connection to the etymon *ḥ-š-p*, which is buttressed by the semantic ranges for the forms in TH 72.16 (*ḥaṣiptum* and *ḥuṣupat*) and of *ḥiṣpatum* provide the primary basis for reading the sibilant as /š/.

10. 1' *a-na ri-qú-ti-ia aš-[b]a-ku-ma* 2' *i-ga-ra-tim i-te-né-em-mi-i[d]* 3' *aš-šum a-na KA.DINGIR.RA.KI at-lu-ki-ia* 4' *a-di eš-ri-šu a-na be-lí-ia* 5' *aš-pu-ra-am-ma ṭe-mu ú-ul iš-ša*.

Marduk or his master –or perhaps both– and thus he summarized his situation as one in which he was prevented from going to Babylon by a serious *hi-iš-pa-tum*.¹¹

In the initial presentation of *AbB* 1 128, Kraus left *hi-iš-pa-tum* untranslated: “aber schwere ... hat sich mir in den Weg gelgt.” He noted, however, that Landsberger had suggested to him that the lemma might be connected to Aramaic *hušpā*, “Frechheit.” Landsberger’s etymology was subsequently picked up by von Soden, who glossed this lone occurrence of the lexeme of *hišpatum* in *AHw*, “Frechheit.”¹² The lemma *hišpatum* was not, however, treated again, to my knowledge, until Lambert added to the discussion both an additional attestation of this noun as well as the insight about the contextual connotations that seemed to be at work in *AbB* 1 128. Lambert made his remarks on the meaning of *hišpatum* in *AbB* 1 128 in his publication of a second occurrence of this lemma in the Babylonian *tamītu*-oracle from Nimrud that concerned Hammurabi’s campaign to Kasalluhhu.¹³ The relevant lines of the *tamītu*-oracle consider the possibility that the enemy will bring about “... collapse, defeat and overthrow, will not cause noise, dismay? [*hi-IS-pat*] from confusion and panic within this city, will not reduce them to shrieking, will not turn them into a ruin heap, will they?”¹⁴ Lambert remarked on his translation that “... an expression of dismay or gloom fits [the *tamītu*-oracle].” Furthermore, he added that the idea that “insolences” were the reason for the servant’s being kept at Sippar in the letter [*AbB* 1 128] “... is improbable in the letter context, since it would be a sharp accusation ...”¹⁵

Lambert’s observation that a meaning akin to “insolence” is not suitable for the attested uses of *hišpatum* is instructive. The comparison of *hišpatum* as well as the forms in *TH* 72.16 *hašiptum* and *huššupat* with the root *h-š-p* known from Aramaic helps to reveal a pattern. The Akkadian forms surveyed above seem to require a meaning that denotes the result of the verbal actions known for the root *h-š-p* in Aramaic.¹⁶ Thus the root *h-š-p* in Aramaic means “to be excessively attentive, be bold” and hence “insolent” (*hušpā*) in the nominal form.¹⁷ The nominal *hišpatum* in Akkadian, however, may be translated “unease, anxiety, vexation,” a meaning that would better fit the context of *AbB* 1 128 where a subordinate might express his “great unease” to his superior, as Lambert has observed. Similarly, in the *tamītu*-oracle, the phrase *hi-iš-pat te-še-e*, which might be

11. 13' *ù hi-iš-pa-tum ka-bi-it-tum* 14' *a-na pa-ni-ia ip-ta-ri-ik*

12. Kraus 1964, 95, n. 127; *AHw*, 1561. At the same time, Kraus seems to have had reservations about the meaning “Frechheit,” as he did not translate this passage, though did include Landsberger’s etymological suggestion via a personal communication.

13. Lambert 2007, 147-8.

14. 73 *mi-qi-ta-šú-nu dub-da-šú-nu ù ka-mar-šú-nu* 74 *la i-šá-ka-nu ri-ig-ma hi-iš-pat te-še-e* 75 *u gaba-rah-ḫi ina libbi āli annī(ne) la isakkanu^m* 76 *šá-ag-gu-mu-ta la ú-šal-la-ku-šú-nu-ti* 77 *ti-la-niš la ú-šem-mu-šú-nu-ti* (Lambert 2007, 25-6).

15. Lambert notes the suggested etymological connection to Northwest Semitic root *h-š-p*, but does not directly engage this proposal (Lambert 2007, 147-8).

16. There is no attested finite form of this root in Akkadian, to my knowledge. As for the meaning of *pirsat*-nouns, a distinct semantic range cannot be determined. Von Soden, noted that “Wurzeln werden nach *pirsat* juristische, technische ...,” citing as examples *risbatum* “brawl,” *mehratum* “copy, equivalence,” *nizmatum* “desire, wish” (*GAG* 72); Edzard’s treatment of *pirsat*-nouns, however, demonstrated the limits of this categorization (Edzard 1982, 77-81, esp. 77 n. 43).

17. Sokoloff 1992, 213 Sokoloff 2002, 479. Brockelman’s etymological suggestion that the Aramaic be connected with the Arabic root *h-š-f* (Brockelmann 1928, 251) has not been received as consensus and may be less likely if the Aramaic root *h-š-p* was realized in Akkadian as *h-š-p* (at the same time, cf. Huehnergard 2003).

rendered “anxiety of confusion,” or “alarm” is appropriate for the context where it is paired with the synonymous *gabarahhu* in the immediately following expression *gaba-raḥ-ḥi ina libbi āli annī(ne)* “panic within this city.” And in TH 72.16, too, the uses of the forms *ḥaṣiptum* and *ḥuṣṣupat* would be consistent with the meanings for the form *ḥiṣpatum* proposed above. The word *ḥaṣiptum*, would be a G-stem verbal adjective, expressing the idea of “anxious, vexed, distressed,” whereas the D-stem predicate adjective, *ḥuṣṣupat*, would denote an intensive sense of the G-stem adjective, thus conveying the idea of “harassed, harried.”¹⁸ In sum, the three forms would create a predictable semantic domain from the nominal “anxiety” (*ḥiṣpatum*), to the adjective “anxious” (*ḥaṣiptum*), to the D-stem intensive adjective “harassed.”

In sum, the forms *ḥaṣiptum* (l. 29) and *ḥuṣṣupat* (l. 30) in TH 72.16 punctuate Zimri-Lim’s bold response to the king of Yamhad, Yarim-Lim. In this missive Zimri-Lim rejoined the king of Yamhad’s accusation that a Mariote smith-worker was responsible for the loss of precious metals and stone from Hazor. It is startling that the Mariote king did not dispute the claim that the missing commodities were entrusted to his smith-worker or that the smith-worker had fled to Mari. Instead, he only debated that his smith-worker was culpable for the losses and that he should be turned over to the king of Yamhad. Zimri-Lim countered that his smith-worker’s alleged misconduct was in fact an instance in which an unfortunate man had been the victim of almost conspiratorial misfortune. He insisted that his smith-worker had not stolen the goods from Hazor, but had purchased them only to be mugged at the city of Emar (lines 15-22). Furthermore, the Mariote king maintained that his smith-worker had not only been relieved of his valuable merchandise at Emar, but also that he had been robbed of the document that served as his receipt of purchase (lines 22-24). Thus Zimri-Lim argued that the king of Yamhad should seek restitution from Emar (lines 36-42), not Mari. In sum, Zimri-Lim displayed remarkable *chutzpah* in TH 72.16 to rejoin the claims made by the king of Yamhad and the men of Hazor and to contend, instead, that his smith-worker was a victim— a distressed (*ḥaṣiptum*) bird that was harried (*ḥuṣṣupat*) by bullying opponents.¹⁹

Appendix: TH 72.16²⁰

2 *a-na[ia-r]i-im-li-im*
qí-bí-ma
’um-ma’zi-[im]-’ri-li’-im
4 [DUMU]-ka-a-ma

Lines 1-4 Speak to Yarim-Lim, thus
says Zimri-Lim, your son.

Lines 5-14 You wrote to me

18. In TH 72.16 the D-stem verbal forms are written variably with doubled radicals, e.g. *ú-ba-zi-’u₅* (line 20) vs. *ú-wa-aš-ša-ar* (lines 32, 33). That the D-stem predicate adjective would be intransitive is not unexpected (see Kouwenberg 1997, 345-6).

19. The image of a bird fleeing before a falcon, as Durand has noted, is elsewhere attested in Old Babylonian sources (Durand 1997, 289 n. f). Particularly noteworthy is Durand’s comparison to Mari letter A.449:9-10. This text contains the expression *iš-šú-ri-[m] pa-ri-it-tim* (“a frightened bird”), in which the lemma *parittum* likely serves as a near synonym for the forms under discussion in TH 72.16 (cf. the translation of this text in Durand 2004, 169). To those examples cited in Durand (1997, 289 n. f.), I would also add a balaḡ for Inanna, which is attested in an Old Babylonian recension, describes the superiority of the goddess over the deities by asserting “the gods are (mere) birds (*iš-šu-ru*), I am their falcon (*ka-sú-su-un*)” (Cohen 1988, 597, 664). The innovation in TH 72.16 is that the image has been tweaked to reinforce Zimri-Lim’s side of the story that his smith-worker was a victim, having been mugged (*ú-ba-zi-’u₅-šú*) and robbed (*i-ki-mu-šú*) of everything he had (cf. Is. 16:2).

20. The readings reproduce those published by Durand 1990, 63 n. 129. Several additional possibilities are included in notes.

aš-šum LÚ.SIMUG.A ki-a-am ta-aš-pu-r[a-a]m
 6 um-ma at-ta-^ra-ma^r LÚ šu-ú
 i-na ha-šú-ra-a^{K1} KÛ.BABBAR KÛ.GI ù NA₄
 8 da-mi-iq-tam it-[b]a-la-am-ma a-na še-ri-ka
 it-ta-al-kam ^rù [L]Ú.MEŠ ha-šú-ra-yu^{K1}
 10 ANŠE.HI.A ù ša-ba-a[m] ša a-na tam-ka-ru-tim
 il-lu ka-lu-ú um-ma-a-mi LÚ SIMUG.A
 12 KÛ.BABBAR KÛ.GI ù NA₄ da-mi-iq-tam
 it-ba-al-ma a-na še-er zi-im-ri-li-im
 14 it-ta-al-kam an-ni-tam ta-aš-pu-ra-am
 mi-im-ma LÚ šu-ú
 16 KÛ.BABBAR KÛ.GI ù NA₄ da-mi-iq-tam
 a-na še-ri-ia
 18 ú-ul ub-la-am
 LÚ ša-a-tu i-na i-ma-ar^{K1}
 20 iš-ba-tu-ma ú-ba-zi-^ru₅ -šu
 ù mi-im-ma ša na-šu-ú
 22 i-ki-mu-šu^o ku-nu-ka-am
 ša a-na KÛ.BABBAR LÚ šu-ú i-ša-mu
 24 it-ba-lu-šu ù LÚ šu-ú i-na pa-an
 na-pí-[i]š-tim a-na še-ri-ia
 26 ú-še-em i-na-an-na a-[b]i aš-šum LÚ ša-a-tu
 iš-pu-ra-am-^rma^r a-na tu-ur LÚ {ŠA A-NA}
 28 ša a-na e[m²¹] i]-šú-ri-im
 ha-ší-i[p-ti]m ša i-na pa-an ka-su-si-im
 30 [h]u-šú-pa-at-ma
 a-na še-ri-[i]a iq-te-em
 32 ù LÚ [ša-a-t]u ú-wa-aš-ša-ar
 ù LÚ ša-a-tu ú-wa-aš-ša-ar-ma wa-ar-ku-um
 34 [i-še-e]m-me-ma ki-ma a-n[a X]-ri-[i]b-^rtim²²
 [i-q]a-at -te-em šum-ma li-ib-bi a-bi-ia-ma
 36 [LÚ] ša-a-^rtu^r a-bi la i-ha-aš-ši-ih [b]a-ší-it LÚ ša-a-tu
 mi-im-ma ša i-na ha-šú-ra-a^{K1}
 38 it-ba-lu i-na i-ma-ar^{K1}
 [lu-ú] ik-k[a²-^rli²⁷-ma] a-bi
 40 [a-na] i-ma-ar^{K1} li-iš-pu-ur-ma
 [ba-š]i-it lú ša-a-tu a-na še-er ša
 42 [pa-a]n a-bi-ia li-il-qú-ú

concerning the smith-worker, saying: “That man has taken silver, gold, and precious stone from Hazor and has gone to you! Now the men of Hazor are detaining the donkeys and the people who went up for trading. (They are) claiming (that) the smith took silver, gold and precious stone and have gone to Zimri-Lim.” This is what you wrote.

Lines 15-26 That man brought neither silver, gold, nor precious stone to me. (Rather,) that man was apprehended in Emar (where) he was mugged. They robbed him (of) everything that he had. They (even) took away the seal(ed document) which that man had bought for silver, so that man escaped to me for (fear of his) life.

Lines 26-36 Now regarding that man, my father wrote to me to return a man who has arrived before me as a distressed bird that was harried by a hawk. Now should I release t[hat] man? If I did release that man, a future (person) will hear that he arrived at/for [x]-ri-[i]b-^rtim^r. (So) if it is pleasing to my father, my father should not requisition that man.

Lines 36-42 That man’s possessions—whatever he brought from Hazor—are being [held²] at Emar. Let my father write to Emar so that they will put that man’s possession at my father’s disposal.

21. It may simply be preferable to read *a-na ki-ma*, as was suggest to me by anonymous review who indicated this was possible based upon an unpublished hand copy that M. Birot had made of the tablet.

22. This is a very difficult restoration. A clever solution has been suggested in Durand 1997, p 390, n. i, namely to read “... comment se présentera-t-on en suppliant chez la déesse bénissante” (34) *ki-ma a-n[a k]a -ri-[i]b-^rtim^r* 35) *[i-q]a-at -te-em*). Alternately, one may read 34) *ki-i* a-[na n]e²*-ri-ib-tim* 35) *[i-q]a-at -te-em*, which may be translated “... that he fled to the entrance (of the city/palace)” (the latter suggestion I owe to an extremely helpful anonymous reviewer).

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